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FORUM 2013 |

Gala Dinner Speech

Madeleine K. Albright

Former U.S. Secretary of State
Chair, Albright Stonebridge Group

Summary

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea, former Secretary of State Dr. Madeleine Albright delivered a speech at the 2013 Asan Washington Forum.

Albright began by reflecting on the Korean War, and was reminded of when her family left for the United States to escape the communist takeover in Czechoslovakia. Her father's advice then was to always "remember who your friends and enemies are" and "fight communism." This formative experience contributed to Albright's understanding and appreciation of the enduring ROK-US alliance as "a blessing to people on both sides of the Pacific while promoting prosperity and advancing the cause of peace in East Asia and across the globe."

As Secretary of State, Albright visited South Korea many times. She expressed confidence that America's commitment to the Republic of Korea is beyond question, as has been reiterated on many occasions by Secretary of State John Kerry and President Barack Obama, including during their visits to Korea.

Albright highlighted her negotiations regarding North Korea's controversial withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and her visit to North Korea in October 2000. She recalled a conversation with Kim Jong-il, who at the time spoke respectfully of South Korea, wished for better relations with the United States, and saw the need for a new economic model. However, Albright also recalled the cyclical nature of North Korea's strategy of renewing talks only to then claim the role of victim before returning to bluster. She observed how North Korea has since moved from discussing a nuclear-free peninsula to seeking recognition as a nuclear power, which Albright insisted is



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“patently unacceptable.” Another notable North Korean reversal was the abrupt shut down of the Kaesong Industrial Complex after years of effort to get it running. Albright maintained that Seoul, Washington, Tokyo, and to the extent possible, Beijing “must speak with one voice reminding North Korea that it still has an opportunity to choose compromise over confrontation and real dialogue over repeated threats.”

Sixty years ago, North Korea was in better shape than it is today, while South Korea was devastated from the Korean War. Yet, through “commitment to innovation, discipline, and productivity,” South Korea achieved the “miracle on the Han River.” Albright praised South Korea for its robust democracy, being the first country to graduate from an aid recipient to an overseas aid donor, hosting the G20, Ban Ki-Moon’s unanimous reelection as Secretary-General of the UN, hosting the second Nuclear Security Summit, and successfully establishing a free trade agreement with the United States. She was confident that South Korea would continue to strengthen its democracy and uphold global norms.

Albright concluded by noting that East Asia has been a driving force in the global economy over the past twenty years, but it is also a region where tensions persist. Given this, Albright stressed her faith in the ROK-US alliance. While the United States will never be an obstacle to reconciliation on the Korean peninsula, it will steadfastly stand with its ally, and remain resolute in dealing with the North. Although the alliance has been tested in the past, and will be tested again in the future, Albright expressed confidence that the alliance will grow in strength and purpose because it represents and protects the ideal of freedom.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.